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ABSTRACT

The job of superintendent is tough and demanding. Although conditions seem to be getting worse, the job has always been demanding because of its origins and its relationship with the board of education. As the job developed, dominant conceptions of leadership developed. The three dominant conceptions--teacher-scholar, administrative chief, and negotiator-statesman-have waxed and waned as time passed, yet they are all still present. They arose from the nature of the superintendent-board relationship and from the competing role demands of that beset the superintendent who has to be chief executive, professional expert on education, advisor to the board, and supervisor. Practices and beliefs grew up around these leadership role conceptions that seemed to succeed in increasing the superintendent's prestige, salary, and tenure. However, the superintendent has always been circumscribed by a complex organizational role, the historical vulnerability of the position, and the particular set of larger environmental forces touching the local school system. This latter aspect was dominant during the 1960s. At a time when sharp external pressure strikes the schools, the leadership pattern with the strongest survival power is the negotiator-statesman. (Author/IRT)

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THE URBAN SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY: A CENTURY AND A HALF OF CHANGE

Larry Cuban

EA 008 048

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THE URBAN SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENCY: A CENTURY AND A HALF OF CHANGE

By Larry Cuban

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FOREWORD

So-called cycles in education provide, in retrospect, invaluable opportunities to examine the shifting interplay between key forces for cooperation and contention in school and society. Today as we observe many developments aimed toward democratizing and attaining locally centered schools, we are well advised to examine carefully the changing demands upon the central administration. How far should we turn back to elements of individual school and neighborhood controls that until the mid-nineteenth century were a hallmark of our schools?

The historical background of the evolution of centralization is intriguing. The American school superintendency has frequently been compared to the position of an executive in the world of business. During the past fifty years the depersonalization, growing bureaucratic isolation, and unbending forces for compartmentalized authority have all been challenged by those who want to restore local identity. These factors have all been disparaged as more than counterbalancing such virtues as efficiency, organization, and unity which have been lauded in defense of centralization ever since New Orleans provided its first city director in the 1820s and Buffalo, the first titled superintendent, a decade later. These professional managers seem in their origins to have been an indigenous development of the American scene; the position probably arose as a response to fragmented districts in a system established first in Massachusetts and Connecticut in the late eighteenth century. As towns grew into cities, as many as twenty local districts might exist within the corporate limits. Articularization and regularization seemed increasingly necessary and the superintendency spread rapidly, paralleling the industrial and urban growth of the nation.

Dr. Cuban is now experiencing the actualities of the background he has researched; one is led to speculate on how differently he might approach this topic after several more years behind the executive desk. Meanwhile, we can profit from this more objective inquiry which must have helped convince him of the worthy challenge of his present pursuits.

Richard E. Gross
Stanford, California

THE PROBLEM

Few people question the importance of the superintendent to the future of a school system. A superintendent somehow influences directly and indirectly the board of education, the bureaucracy he manages, the staff he heads, and the students he is responsible for. What a school chief does and does not do in these areas affect the community. In short, most educators, board members, teachers, and members of the community believe that a superintendent makes a difference in their children's education.

Furthermore, few people question that the job is a tough, demanding one. During the last decade, one city superintendent has been murdered, many have suffered heart attacks and ulcers, and scores have been fired. The job has always been tagged as a difficult executive post.

Consider turnover rates. In the twenty-five largest school systems, twenty-three new superintendents were appointed between 1970 and 1973. While superintendents leave office for many reasons, there is little doubt that they are leaving sooner. In 1953, for the twenty-five largest school systems, the average term in office for incumbent superintendents was six and a half years. A decade later it had slipped to five and a half years. In 1971 it was just over four years.

Consider the attractiveness of the job. By 1970, salaries for big-city school superintendents were in the mid-thirty thousands. Fringe benefits ranged from liberal leave and retirement plans to a personal car, often with a chauffeur. Contracts had lengthened to three and four years. Yet when Pittsburgh, a school system of

75,000 students, advertised for its top post, only fifty candidates applied. Two hundred miles away, York, Pennsylvania, a school system of 8,000 children, advertised for a school chief and received over 160 applications. In northern California, a small, affluent district like Los Gatos received over 200 applications for its vacant superintendency. With salaries reaching levels comparable to urban mayors, judges, and state officials, with ample fringe benefits, with the longest contracts schoolmen have enjoyed in this century, big-city school systems find it tough to recruit the best for the superintendency.

Why this shying away from big cities? The answer is complicated. Racial politics, increasing poverty, declining school population, combined with the problem of reduced budgets because the public is increasingly reluctant to spend dollars on schools, suggest part of the answer. Nor should one overlook the cross-cutting, demanding nature of the job itself. "For catastrophes, disorders, demonstrations and strikes," veteran Columbus, Ohio, school chief Harold Eibling wrote (shortly before retiring), "all have become part of the new order of reality for the large city superintendent."

Is it, however, a "new order of reality"? A half-century ago, a schoolman familiar with the battles of superintendents, described the position in these words:

> He knows from statistics, observation, and experience that he is in the most hazardous occupation known to insurance actuaries. Deep sea diving and structural steel work have nothing on the business of school superintending. Lloyds will insure the English clerk against rain on his weekend vacation, but no gambling house would be sufficiently reckless to bet on the chances of re-election for school superintendents three years or even two years ahead. . . .

The Veteran Battler, as the schoolman called himself, went on to list the reasons for dismissal of superintendents by boards of education.

> He smoked; he couldn't make a speech; he talked too much; he was unmarried; he was married to the wrong kind of woman; he was too old; he was too much of a mixer; he was too much occupied with his own affairs. . . .

ORIGINS OF THE SUPERINTENDENCY

In the beginning there were boards of education and teachers. Boards begat principals and superintendents. And superintendents (among others) begat expert school executives.

In the colonial and revolutionary periods there was a bewildering variety of schools. Few public and mostly private, these schools, found in rented rooms, in cottages, lofts, and the like, were most often a teacher or master and a number of students from families that paid for the teacher. In the larger towns, especially in New England, the common practice was for the public school trustees (or board of education) to hire the teacher. In 1645, for example, Roxbury (Massachusetts) citizens agreed to erect a free school and allot twenty pounds annually for the schoolmaster and set up a governing board of seven townsmen with the power to "put in or remove the schoolmaster, to see to the well-ordering of the school and scholars, to receive and pay the said twenty pounds."

Most formal schools were small—one teacher and two or three score students. The larger, private academies and church-sponsored schools had headmasters whose chief function remained teaching. Principals and superintendents, as we know them, had to wait for the swollen villages bursting with immigrants that marked the early decades of the nineteenth century. Once schools swelled in size, administrators came on the scene.

For most cities in the mid-nineteenth century, state legislatures and city councils had chartered local school boards to hire teachers, buy books, build schools, and supervise instruction.

When cities were no more than large villages, the unpaid, popularly elected (or politically appointed), part-time trustee proved workable. But as city population swelled and soaring numbers of children crowded classrooms, harried, unpaid board members trying to squeeze in school affairs while working full time elsewhere found it increasingly difficult to perform all their mandated duties.

As early as 1837 in Buffalo and increasingly during the following decades, city boards hired principals and superintendents to ease their official burdens. What lay boards needed most help with was supervision. When a motion was introduced in the New Orleans board in 1847 to abolish the position of superintendent, a committee reported that,

> a board of directors, composed of gentlemen retired from business, who were familiar with the general subject and who were willing to devote their time and attention to the supervision of the schools might dispense with the services of a superintendent.

But the committee concluded that "those who are now directors . . . do not constitute such a board."

Boards needed help. As mushrooming school populations forced them to seek help in supervision, they turned to principals and superintendents. The principalship grew with the size of school.

With the growing practice of teaching children by levels, schools of 100 or more children had two or more teachers. The common practice in the early nineteenth century was for the board to designate one of them, usually the male, as the Principal Teacher. With the rapid growth in enrollment, it was only a matter of time before administrative duties began crowding out teaching responsibilities. Consider the duties of Cincinnati principals as early as 1853:

> The Male Principal, as the local superintendent, is responsible for the observance and enforcement of the rules and regulations of the Board . . .
>
> He is to classify the pupils in the different grades above the primary department. . . . He shall employ half an hour each day in visiting the School . . . and shall announce to the other departments, by the ringing of a bell, beginning and closing school, for the recitation of classes and for recess. He shall promulgate to all the Teachers such rules and regulations as he may receive from the Board. . . . He shall transmit to the Clerk, at the close of each

school month, all bills for salaries of teachers and report monthly to the Board according to blank forms furnished him. . . . Any failure, except sickness, to file with Clerk the reports . . . will debar him from reception of his salary until the same is rendered to the satisfaction of the Board.

He shall also at the close of each school year return to the Clerk the keys to the rooms of the house over which he has had charge. He shall see to the safe keeping and protection of the house, furniture, apparatus, fences, trees and shrubbery and maintain the strictest cleanliness in the school and out houses. . . .

By the Civil War, large urban school systems had begun to reduce teaching responsibilities of principals. In 1857, for example, Boston Superintendent John Philbrick reported that in some of the larger schools, when a portion of the day was set aside by principals for inspection and examination of primary classes, the head assistant in the school took charge of the principal's classes.

While similar in development, the office of superintendent did not evolve from the classroom, although many early appointees were drawn from the ranks of teachers. As one former schoolman reminded his readers, the first superintendent's duties "originated in the delegation to him of powers every one of which belonged to the board and that the board still often exercises." Child of the school board, the superintendency would mature, struggle with its parent endlessly, and never escape that fact of ancestry.

Most nineteenth-century superintendents had little trouble keeping busy. Listen to a Portland (Oregon) superintendent describe what was expected of him in 1888.

> The ability not only to supervise and direct the legitimate work of a city system of schools, to examine and estimate the work done in every department from the infant class to our eighth grade to the high school, but also to turn his attention to the condition of the sewers and water pipes; to inspect furnaces and heating apparatus; to repair streets and sidewalks; to prepare plans and details for schoolhouses; to prepare the specifications for and take charge of all the supplies used and see to their distribution and economical use; to attend all board meetings and keep detailed duplicate accounts of the entire income and expenditures of the department. . . .

Our harried Portland superintendent did not mention (although he did them) inspecting classes, examining applicants for teaching positions, conducting faculty meetings, helping select textbooks, determining which pupils would be promoted, sus-

pending troublesome children, and keeping late office hours to meet with parents and teachers.

But hiring and firing of teachers, letting of contracts, purchasing of books—potent sources of political and economic influence within the community—remained the privileged domain of school trustees. Some boards asked their superintendents for advice in these areas; most did not. By the 1880s, with the superintendency a bare generation old, supervision of pupils, teachers, and physical plant were the mainstays of the urban schoolman's job.

A Brooklyn paper remembered long-time superintendent J. W. Bulkley, who industriously visited classes daily for his eighteen years, as one who was not consulted by his board:

> There are members of the board who are ranged as old members who try in vain to remember ever having heard any suggestion from the superintendent touching public school management. Of the merits of the school books, the construction of school buildings, the grading of school studies. . . . The board never thought of consulting its superintendent and the superintendent never hazarded his own peace by troubling the board on such matters.

Not all schoolmen, of course, were like Bulkley. William T. Harris in St. Louis (1868-1880), James W. Greenwood in Kansas City (1874-1914), Aaron Gove in Denver (1874-1904), and John Philbrick (1856-1878) actively worked with their boards to bring order out of the chaos of mushrooming school populations layered onto archaic forms of governance designed for village schools.

But most superintendents lacked the skills, charisma, or good fortune that permitted these veterans to serve such long tenures. Too often an urban schoolman who offered unsolicited advice or implemented a pet idea without gaining full board approval found himself unemployed. Most superintendents at this time served under one-year contracts and went about their supervisory duties circumspectly, hoping to win reelection, as it was called, at year's end.

AN EMERGING PROFESSION

In the last two decades of the nineteenth century, when captains of corporations were shaking down their organizational behemoths into trimmer, more efficient operations, and when evangelical faith in scientific rationality gripped the intellectual community, a loosely allied coalition of corporate-minded reformers, university professors, and concerned superintendents found urban schools slothful, inefficient, and hopelessly mired in corrupt politics. These reformers felt there was a mindless order to the factory-like city schools presided over by drill sergeants called superintendents. They felt that school boards of thirty and forty members with standing committees were cumbersome and grossly inefficient. School trustees elected by ward were too vulnerable to political chicanery and boondoggling. Too often office was sought by "patientless doctors and clientless lawyers." To reformers the fault rested with how schools were governed.

Boards of education should be smaller and drawn from upper-class gentlemen interested in partisan politics. Rather than the twenty-six board members in Cleveland or forty-two in Philadelphia there should be five or seven successful businessmen and professionals transacting school affairs. Smaller, citywide (rather than ward-based) boards composed of the "better" classes would, they felt, eliminate the "depth of cupidity and cold-blooded selfishness manifested by the partisan politicians."

The other half of the governance problem was persistent lay interference in a superintendent's business. As it stood, according to reformers, board members haggled over which grammar book

to use, whether to mandate a sloping or vertical method of penmanship, whether the board president's uncle would sell his lot for a new school building, or whether the new desks should be maple or oak. These matters, reformers argued, were best left to the experts, the superintendents.

Given their experience and scientific approach to problem solving, superintendents could deal with these matters in a professional manner. "The most notable examples of marked progress in city schools," three schoolmen concluded in an 1890 report to their colleagues, "have been due to the wise commitment of their management to a superintendent selected because of his known ability, not merely to 'run the schools' but to devise, organize, direct, and make successful a rational system of instruction."

Thus small centralized boards under expert leadership, reformers concluded, would insulate school operations from corrupt politics, leaving sufficient flexibility to professional schoolmen to root out inefficient, archaic practices while installing sound operating procedures. Left to the leadership of superintendents and small boards, business would be calmly and quickly transacted through rapid approval of the executive's recommendations. This was how a school system should properly operate.

By 1910, reform efforts were largely successful. Urban school boards had shrunk from an average of sixteen in 1895 to nine in 1915. The annual reports of the Department of Superintendence were filled with praise of "expert" leadership, "efficiency-minded" schoolmen, and the rapid development of professional leadership. While the one effort urban schoolmen made to grasp complete independence from school boards in 1895 failed, their determined drive to gain greater authority met with success. A survey of urban superintendents in 1910 found almost half of the top administrators in twenty large cities satisfied with their powers. A handful made no comment and only three clearly wanted more. And finally, Columbia, Stanford, Yale, and other universities undertook graduate programs for the training of school administrators.

Exactly what did these schoolmen have in mind when they spoke and wrote about professional leadership? How did they view themselves as educational leaders? What range of leadership roles did they see as available to them?

Dominant Conceptions of Leadership, 1870-1910

Three ideal-types of superintendent leadership existed: Teacher-Scholar, Chief Administrator, and Negotiator-Statesman. As with all descriptions of ideal-types, no description of individuals is intended. The purpose is to call attention to pure traits that characterized a conception of leadership role. In the writings and speeches of top urban superintendents, these three types were clearly evident.

Teacher-Scholar

The Teacher-Scholar surfaced early and vigorously in the thinking of schoolmen. St. Louis Superintendent W. T. Harris, a virtual prototype for this conception, bluntly stated that the superintendent is a "specialist in matters of education." The most important job of the urban schoolman, he said, was "how to make good teachers out of poor ones." Veteran superintendent James W. Greenwood of Kansas City divided a superintendent's job into office work, school work, and outside work. He saw his job clearly: "I do not trouble the members of the board. . . . They watch the business matters and I look after the schools." Between 7:30 and 9:00 he took care of clerical and administrative work such as "sending out substitutes to readmitting mischievous boys." The bulk of the day was spent on "visiting schools and inspecting the work." When schools closed, he returned to his office and remained until 6:00 doing office work and interviewing teachers. Greenwood must have sighed as he said, "In one sense, I am a sort of mill—grinding out everything."

To Horace Tarbell, Providence superintendent for almost two decades, the dangers before a city superintendent were that "he may become a business man, a manager of affairs, rather than continue to maintain the attitude of the scholar and become more and more the teacher." Worse yet, "he may become the politician."

Indianapolis, and later Cleveland, schoolman Lewis Jones saw the proper function of supervisors and administrators to study with his teachers psychology, child study, and methodology. "If the superintendent," he said to brother schoolmen, "can come to be the acknowledged leader in such broad consideration of . . . education he will have done much to enlarge the horizons of his teachers."

Each of these superintendents wrote extensively on the history and philosophy of education, as well as how best to teach. Their view was summed up in an 1890 report on urban superintendents that defined specifically the job of city schoolmen.

> It must be made his recognized duty to train teachers and inspire them with high ideals; to revise the course of study when new light shows that improvement is possible; to see that pupils and teachers are supplied with needed appliances for the best possible work; to devise rational methods of promoting pupils. . . .

In short, the concept of Teacher-Scholar was deeply rooted in the thinking of leading superintendents.

Administrative Chief

The man-in-charge image generated an enormous range of analogies and metaphors in superintendent speeches. Consider "prime minister;" or "he is the helmsman who must consider wind, steam, storm, and tide;" or the superintendent is "the governor and the fly-wheel of the educational system;" or the simple "chief executive officer." Taking initiative, exercising authority, scientific planning of instruction and curriculum, and careful management were themes that vibrated resonantly in speeches and reports of urban schoolmen in these years.

Former superintendent and editor E. E. White chaired a committee that reported to top administrators. The "one essential condition of progress for a city superintendent," it said, is that "the taking of the initiative be his right and duty." Andrew Draper campaigned aggressively for a strong superintendency. "I am not in favor of limiting the authority of city superintendents," he argued at one national meeting. "If I could . . . I would give them almost autocratic powers within their sphere of duty and action and then I would hold them responsible for results." His ideas shaped the committee report on "organizing of City School Systems" that he chaired. "The superintendent of instruction," the report concluded, ". . . should be charged with the responsibility of making that (instruction) professional and scientific and should be given the position and authority to accomplish that end."

The model held up for all schoolmen to admire was the Cleveland Plan inaugurated in 1892. There a small school council hired a director and gave him complete executive authority. The School Director appointed a Superintendent of Instruction who

hired and fired all of his assistants and teachers without interference from the Council or School Director. Chairman Draper, superintendent for two years under this structure and the man who dismissed almost a hundred teachers for incompetence (a fact that he often mentioned publicly) fervently believed that the superintendent was the expert who directed, planned, and executed school affairs.

With few reservations, fellow superintendents enthusiastically adopted the Draper Report as well as his phrase that soon became a maxim among urban administrators: "bodies legislate and individuals execute." So, too, did veteran superintendent Frank Spaulding gain approving nods from his listeners when he said that "what the school administrator has to do (is) . . . project ideas ahead, then work up to them." But urban schoolmen were also conceived as administrators. The concepts of economically managing buildings, fiscal affairs, and personnel, caught aptly in the often used phrase that the superintendent should be "a man of affairs," emerged early in the superintendency. Or as one writer defined the phrase,

> By this I mean not only that he should know the details of the school plant and equipment, from pens and ink to plumbing fixtures and vacuum cleaners, but that he should be an expert in warming, ventilating, school seating, decorating and landscape gardening and engine rooms and toilets.

By 1890 disagreement over the nature of the superintendency was expressed in speeches, articles, and heated discussions (conducted, however, with genteel courtesy). The lines of argument crystallized over whether the functions of a big-city superintendent should be separated into two distinct jobs, i.e. business manager and superintendent of instruction, a position recommended in the Draper Report, or that the superintendent simply surrender to the inevitable impact of largeness upon school systems and become efficient managers.

Former Cleveland Superintendent B. A. Hinsdale saw two classes of schoolmen. Leaving out the "nobodies, there are now . . . two classes of superintendents, the line of division, which is by no means a hard and fast one, running between business and professional duties." He concluded that superintendents are either "men of the office" or they are "of the schoolroom." Given this split, one he had written about as early as 1888, Hinsdale pre-

dicted that in large cities the "superintendent will more and more tend to machinery and administration; that he will become even more an office man than he is now."

Thus, well before schoolmen spliced on the technology of scientific management to school affairs in the World War I years and after, competing views of the superintendent as administrator had stitched themselves tightly into the thinking of urban educators.

Negotiator-Statesman

Some superintendents, sensitive to the impact of the community, the diversity of groups that schools needed for both financial and moral support, and the inherent vulnerability of the position, evolved the Negotiator-Statesman conception. The taint of corrupt politics, job-grubbing teachers, and venal trustees, however, curbed the rhetoric about the political side of superintending.

"While every year new men come upon the school board for the sake of keeping in employment certain teachers," William Creery, Baltimore superintendent in 1873, said, "it is the part of wisdom for us not to claim power but to create a popular sentiment." A decade later, a brother schoolman concluded that the "work of a superintendent is also political in its character. He ought to be a politician." Quickly, he assured his listeners that he didn't mean partisan ones or "in the common acceptation of that term," only "one versed in the science of government." A few decades later, another superintendent addressing his colleagues reminded them that,

> When we can secure the cooperation of a few influential men and women of the community, the support of two or three newspapers to whose opinion the public listens, the influence of clubs—clubs of the gentler sort—the endorsement of a chamber of commerce perhaps we have taken a long step in the direction of making outside conditions favorable to successful management.

Evidence drawn from speeches and articles of respected big-city superintendents in the decades following the Civil War suggests the existence of these three conceptions. Some schoolmen said the nature of the superintendency dictated one of these leadership roles; others urged various combinations of these role conceptions; and some, like R. W. Stevenson, coalesced all into an ideal: "As the superintendent of instruction, scholarly, judicious, systematic, and comprehensive; as the manager of finance,

shrewd, economical, and liberal; and as a politician, discreet, active, fearless, and patriotic."

A shift away from the Teacher-Scholar conception toward the Chief Administrator and Negotiator-Statesman took place between 1900 and 1920. Second, while dramatic in a few categories, the shift was a slow, steady drift from one view to the others.

By 1910, many schoolmen felt their powers had increased. Of fifty big-city chiefs, surveyed in their areas of concern (appointment power, determining the budget, course of study, etc.), almost 90 percent felt that the superintendent's power had definitely increased. However, over half of those who answered the question felt that the increased power was due to "appreciation of expert administration" or the "necessity of effective administration in a large business" or "the need for expert management."

And by 1920, most big-city administrators could appoint and dismiss principals and teachers, determine new programs and policies in both curriculum and instruction, select textbooks, and prepare the budgets. All of these initiatory powers, of course, required board approval for implementation. Still, the power to act had passed from the board room to the superintendent's office.

So, too, by the 1920s and 1930s, more and more school executives moved into community activities. One study reported that 41 percent of urban superintendents were officers in the local Rotary, Kiwanis, Chamber of Commerce, and similar groups. A decade later, the figure soared to 68 percent.

Why These Conceptions?

The Teacher-Scholar conception derived directly from the mandate of school boards to their first appointees. Consider further that part-time elected (or appointed) boards of education authorized by law to make policy could hire and fire their superintendents. From the very birth of the superintendency, then, there was a fundamental layman-schoolman split as well as insecurity of tenure.

Take the job insecurity: Until the early twentieth century the usual practice had been for a board to offer an annual contract to its administrator. Many schoolmen viewed their job as a delicate exercise in satisfying their employer. Diplomatic skills, a bent for

negotiation, and a high tolerance for compromise were necessary to survive annual reelection by the board. That nasty word "politics" that so many urban superintendents detested described significant pieces of the behavior of superintendents who stretched annual or indefinite contracts into two or more decades of service.

Reform efforts between 1890 and 1910 successfully shrank school board size and duties while turning over more and more decision-making authority to professionals. Accordingly, contracts offered to superintendents lengthened. Still veteran schoolmen remained insecure. When an AASA president, a respected superintendent with a sterling record in a number of cities, was summarily booted out of office, as Willard Goslin was from Pasadena in 1950, an electric shock crackled through the ranks of school executives. It was no secret that after eight decades, professional schoolmen remained vulnerable and insecure.

If job insecurity helps to explain the growth of the concept of a Negotiator-Statesman, then professional insecurity may also help explain the further development of the Teacher-Scholar leadership conception and the seeds of the Chief Administrator.

The conception of superintendent as expert can be found in Department of Superintendence proceedings as early as 1873. By the 1890s the belief was entrenched and often expressed in writings of urban schoolmen; it was buttressed by a belief system holding organization, rationality, and efficiency as a new trinity for an emerging profession. If superintendents could convince lay boards of their expertise, professionalism, and the rational approach to decision making then few boards could challenge the experts in an era of almost unanimous agreement that organizations should be run scientifically and efficiently. Professional expertise gave urban school executives a pedestal on which they could stand apart from and above the messy politics that invariably occurred within boards of education. Furthermore, it gave them a major resource to bargain with in dealing with the board. In doing so, administrators lessened somewhat their job insecurity.

To put the argument another way, the concept of professional expertness—spreading as it did from the larger Progressive movement—probably was embraced passionately by schoolmen as much to decrease their vulnerability to lay interference, as out of a sincere belief in scientific rationality as the solution to educational

problems. It would not be the first, nor the last, time that fervent ideals and occupational self-interest marched to the same tune.

From the image of professional expert grew the conception of Chief Administrator who conducted the school machine like an expert engineer. The Chief Administrator planned, initiated, and executed decisions with dispatch. The Chief was conductor and engineer. Leaning heavily on management skills, the school boss strove for a smoothly humming operation. Consider Ellwood P. Cubberley, the professor who saw the superintendency in precisely these terms.

> His (that is, the superintendent) is the central office in the school system up to which and down from which authority, direction and inspiration flow. He is the organizer and director of the work in the schools in all their different phases, and the representative of the schools and all for which the schools stand before the people of the community. He is the executive officer of the school board and also its eyes and ears and brains.

It should, then, come as no surprise that after 1910 a variety of school experts developed within the profession.

Graduate schools of education began introducing administration courses. And with the frenetic burst of city school surveys, both movements interacted with the introduction of scientific management *a la* Frederick Taylor to produce a bewildering variety of professional experts. In the 1920s and 1930s, no facet of school administration escaped the scrutiny of education professors, survey teams, and efficiency experts. Everything that moved (and didn't move) was counted, numbered, categorized, and costed out. Superintendents won reputations as Administrative Leader, a Plant Man, Good Personnel Type, Solid Business Administrator, or Dependable Budget Man.

In short, then, three basic leadership conceptions of superintendents were uncovered between 1870-1950. Each one waxed and waned as time passed, yet none disappeared. They competed; they were durable. They arose from the very nature of the superintendent-board relationship. Competing role demands beset the superintendent. He was to be chief executive, professional expert on education, advisor to the board on the staff, and supervisor. Around these competing demands of the superintendent grew, as pearls around grains of sand, diverse views of the position.

Since boards determined employment, since boards and schoolmen could seldom clarify the blurred lines of authority between them, and since schools operated in a fluid environment that often placed conflicting demands upon both sets of actors, the conceptions of Negotiator-Statesman, Chief Administrator, and Teacher-Scholar emerged inevitably as superintendents sought to survive annual reelection and, ultimately, to separate themselves from lay interference.

The reader should be reminded that these conceptions are ideal-types and no single superintendent, past or present, fits any one conception completely. The use of types is to call attention to role demands that emerged from the very nature of the position. Most superintendents combined two or more of these role conceptions into their dominant leadership patterns.

Emergence of Codes of Ethics: Serviceable Myths

The need to survive in a job beset by conflicting demands both outside and within a complex organization were constants over the century that helped each generation of schoolmen develop defenses and patterned responses to external pressure. From experience grew a folk wisdom worn smooth and polished into principles. Each generation of schoolmen contributed behaviors, tempered by the crucible of experience that hardened into accepted practices. Some may call these principles and accepted practices the core of professionalism; others may call them myths. Whatever the label, past experiences of big-city superintendents cannot be ignored.

The core of the new code was the integrity and independence of the office of superintendent, meaning primarily its freedom from community pressures to influence what schoolmen considered strictly professional matters. Consider, for example, an 1895 resolution passed by the Department of Superintendence.

> The public schools should be absolutely free from the domination of those who would prostitute them to political or personal ends. The management of the schools should be in the hands of educational experts clothed with adequate power, protected in their tenure of office and held responsible for results.

Almost two decades later, another resolution condemned outsiders investigating school systems "whose obvious purposes are

to debase the system or exalt the investigators." In the late 1920s, the annual convention commended school superintendents who were called upon "to take a stand for what they know to be right and necessary for education in the face of hostile political and partisan activity." And in 1940, a resolution warned superintendents that from "innumerable groups come demands that the educational program serve some special or selfish interest." The assembled schoolmen resolved to "defend the integrity of our schools and keep them free from the control of all special interest groups." What must guide educators should be the "soundest available scientific thought and usage."

So, too, by the time top urban administrators assumed office, much of the folk wisdom and accepted practices had been elevated into ethical principles. The American Association of School Administrators "Code of Ethics" adopted in 1962 laid out specific examples of ethical and unethical conduct for superintendents. These suggest the strength attained by some key principles and practices from schoolmen's past experiences that were seen as so essential as to be graven into a Thou Shalt Not. No inference should be made that school chiefs needed a printed list of ethical rules to guide their behavior.

These ethical rules as well as organizational routines are cited to suggest that superintendents saw themselves as acting in the best traditions of the organization and the highest ideals of the office. When they were attacked by the press, professors, civil rights activists, outraged parents for what they did or didn't do, a keen sense of injustice rankled them. They were being attacked for acting not only in what they saw as the best interests of the children but also within the framework of ethical principles of a proud profession.

Consider outside participation. Save for PTAs, unstructured groups of citizens coming to board meetings, parent associations, and the usual Rotary, Kiwanis, chamber of commerce groups, the "Code of Ethics" prescribed that the "ideals of his profession require a school administrator to resist ideological pressures that would contravene the fundamental principles of public education." Furthermore, the ethical administrator "resists all attempts by vested interests to infringe upon the school's program as a means of promoting their selfish purposes." In other words, what a civil rights representative saw as the rightful participation of his

group in a public enterprise, a big-city school chief may have seen as an interest group seeking private gain at public expense.

For conflict inside the organization, an ethical administrator "has an obligation to support publicly the school board if either is unjustly accused." Nor should he "permit himself to become involved publicly in personal criticism of board or staff members." Nor may he "make derogatory statements about a colleague or a school system 'unless compelled to under oath.'" And even if the board adopted policies that the schoolman opposed, it is "not just cause for refusal by the administrator to support and execute them." However, if there was a bad law, the superintendent should not avoid controversy; he should work to revise or repeal the law. Unity was inscribed as the ethic. Conflict, especially if it comes to public notice, was proscribed.

On equality, superintendents must be "impartial in the execution of school policies." It is unethical to "give preferential consideration to any individual or group because of their special status or position in the school system or community." Yet the ethical administrator "recognizes that equal educational opportunities for all pupils may require greater or different resources for some than for others." Compensatory programs for disadvantaged children is in the highest ethical tradition of schoolmen but a racial census of transfer of children to achieve racial balance would be, within the superintendent's view, contrary to ethics of his profession.

These rules for professional conduct end with the statement that "what happens in and to the public schools of America happens to America." Thus, in less than a century and a half, from a hired hand to supervise teachers in frail buildings and examine pupils for promotion, the superintendency had become, in the profession's eyes, the linchpin for the rise or decline of a nation.

THE CHALLENGE OF THE 1960s AND 1970s

From the origin and growth of the superintendency grew the fundamental insecurity of the position. From the very birth of the job, competing role demands upon the superintendent arose, continuing unabated until the present. Historically vulnerable to outside pressure, urban schoolmen created conceptions of leadership crystallized around these expectations. These views nourished beliefs and behavior that superintendents were experts possessing the special competence necessary to manage public schools.

Around these leadership role conceptions grew up practices and beliefs that seemed to succeed in increasing prestige, salary, and tenure. Each generation of urban schoolmen reinforced these practices and beliefs through their professional associations, educational journals, and periodic meetings, coming to believe that such traditions were essential for professional conduct and survival. In other words, a series of rights and wrongs, acceptable and unacceptable practices, legitimate and illegitimate choices—in a word, norms—developed around the position of the superintendency. Refined and polished by experience, these norms formed the core of a professional ideology firmly embedded in historical experience of vulnerable schoolmen trying very hard to survive a most complex, demanding job.

The ideology was deposited in codes of ethics, in organizational structure and rules within each large school system, and in an intricate web of professional expectations of colleagues and board of education members. Even had they willed it, few big-city

superintendents could escape the embrace of this pervasive, professional ideology.

Consider also the conflicting demands of a large organization upon its top executive. Most big-city superintendents since the 1920s, for example, headed organizations of hundreds of administrators and thousands of teachers. They were responsible to boards of education and often took oaths to obey the laws of the state as well as offering public pledges to serve the educational interests of millions of parents and children without ignoring taxpayers' concerns.

For most urban superintendents there was a perpetual crossfire of expectations, requests, and demands from board members, middle-level administrators, principals, teachers, students, and civic groups. With crises breaking daily and enormous demands placed upon the chief's limited time, schoolmen were often forced to adopt the traditional stances and strategies that had worked for predecessors and colleagues to avoid conflict while trying to maximize consensus within the organization. Such cross-cutting pressures upon executives shoved them into playing out roles (each historically defined) that would gain and retain support without sacrificing their claim to expertness. Much like a juggler who keeps a dozen objects in the air on a windy day, he constantly moves about keeping his eyes roving—very uncertain whether he has the whole dozen but fearful of stopping to find out.

Still unexplained is why many urban schoolmen resigned under fire, eagerly sought early retirement, or simply fled the position in the 1960s and 1970s. One factor may be the substantial influence of the larger environment.

When the impact of the larger environment is inserted into the equation, an element critical to explaining why superintendents survived or departed is added. Larger environment refers to the dominant socioeconomic trends, intellectual climate, and political movements that create the setting within which the large urban school system operates.

The 1950s had been years of national political conservatism, population shifts from farm to city and city to suburb, the reassertation of humanitarian concern for racial minorities, and the expansion of schooling. Even if the Kennedy years were not as

left of center as initially thought, active federal concern for social issues, the rising tide of popular protest against racial injustice—North and South—continual economic prosperity, and the explosion of Great Society programs following the death of President Kennedy brought different actors, different interest groups, different expectations, and most important for our school chiefs, different demands at the urban classroom door.

Save for the Sputnik controversy, which lasted but a few years (1958-1960), the perspective of the 1950s had schools as an expanding, essential operation highly regarded by most urbanites. Criticism there was, of course, but the general view of urban schools was positive, still accepting the belief that schooling was the path to national greatness and personal success. Typical of the criticism was the highly respected James Conant who issued sober reports to the nation on education. His reports pointed out the weaknesses but mirrored these affirmative beliefs in the recommendations offered to strengthen the schools—many of which were fervently embraced by schoolmen.

In the early 1960s, however, the situation in urban schools became more frequently defined as critical. Whether city schools had declined in quality as critics claimed, is hard to assess. Certainly, more information was available than before. More groups, especially in civil rights, were making more demands than previously. "Integration," "culturally deprived," "slum schools," "*de facto* segregation" became the new magic words. Probably the most important phenomenon was the increasing numbers of citizens who were losing confidence in schools. Old belief systems came under attack. Questioning of education as the "great equalizer" or vehicle for individual success increased. If James Conant's studies reflected the faith of the 50s in schools, Ivan Illich's *Deschooling Society* harvested the growing despair with education that grew throughout the 1960s.

What faced such respected school chiefs as Washington's Carl Hansen, Chicago's Benjamin Willis, and San Francisco's Harold Spears in the 1960s were unfamiliar demands, expectations, and groups. The world seemed to have changed on them. What worked for Philadelphia's Allan Wetter, Milwaukee's Harold Vincent, and Detroit's Samuel Brownell in the 1950s seemingly failed a decade later. Carl Hansen, darling of the liberal, integrationist community in the 1950s was tagged as a racist in the 60s.

As new crises erupted, as external pressure escalated, superintendents responded in familiar ways that had seemingly worked previously, ways they had learned through experience and shared with colleagues, ways they believed in. But their responses were often misinterpreted, criticized sharply. They seemed inappropriate now. For Harold Spears or Benjamin Willis to reject a demand from civil rights activists for a racial census—a request that represented a shocking denial of equality in the two men's frame of reference—further inflamed passions rather than defusing them. They were saying the right things, pulling the right levers, and pushing the right buttons, except that the expected responses seldom turned up. They had played the game properly, but now somehow, someone had changed the rules and neglected to tell them. In their terms, the world had gone awry.

Circumscribed, then, by the complex organizational role of superintendent, the historical vulnerability of the position, and, finally, by the particular set of larger environmental forces touching the local school system, the personality, intelligence, and style of urban superintendents seemingly wrought little influence upon what ultimately happened.

While that, indeed, is the explanation offered, it is not to argue that big-city school chiefs were wholly programmed by experience and current situations to play out a sequence of moves that were preordained. Nor is it meant to argue that what did happen had to occur. This is not a scenario for a Greek tragedy. Personal styles, leadership role, or some other factor may well have made a difference in response patterns and survival ratios. After all, while many superintendents were coerced into resigning, some survived the 1960s. Harold Eibling served Columbus, Ohio, schools for fifteen years, 1956-1971. Others survived the 1960s intact. Some margin for the ambiguous quality of leadership remains. How large that margin is, whether it is porous or rigid, continues to taunt researchers.

One variable that may explain the survival of some school executives is that in times when sharp external pressure strikes the schools, especially from well-organized interest groups, and in times when public opinion of school leadership becomes sharply skeptical—in such times (e.g. 1910-1919, 1960s, and 1970s), the dominant leadership pattern with the strongest survival power is the Negotiator-Statesman.

The Rational School Chief conception is bound to ideals, norms, and strategies that minimize conflict and sees all problems as soluble. When conflict escalates, especially when it comes from outside the organization, superintendent efforts to minimize and eliminate it may seriously misjudge and underestimate the sources and direction of that conflict. The Negotiator-Statesman conception at least embraces the notion that either external or organizational conflict is inevitable, even basic to human affairs. Different interest groups are legitimate and somehow must be dealt with. It seems that for the 1960s in big cities, this leadership role had more survival power than other ones. The next decade is likely to see more urban superintendents approach the role of Negotiator-Statesman.

In other periods, when public confidence in school leadership is unshaken, when criticism of schools is unorganized and sporadic, other leadership conceptions seem to have made a better match with the climate of the times, although one could just as easily argue that under those conditions any conception of leadership would work.

What is suggested is that any given superintendent is not a man of all seasons. Respected professional to friend and stubborn bureaucrat to critic, the big-city school chief could not easily adjust to seasonal changes. The fit between the times, the local political context, and the dominant concept of leadership may well determine whether a schoolman can do an effective job. There are fall, summer, spring, and winter superintendents—to stretch the metaphor—none for all seasons.

Studying big-city administrators historically leaves one with a reduced sense of the heroic in superintending. The superman image summoned up by AASA literature and boards of education search committees testify more to aspirations than to reality. More modesty, a surer sense of humility about the claims for superintendent leadership seem to be in order.

While modest, perhaps even humble, views of what a big-city superintendent can achieve as a leader of a school system seem in order, the chances of either occurring is slim. A public whose confidence in schooling has eroded over the last decade and a profession still anxious to minimize its historic vulnerability seem unlikely to reduce their high expectations.

Those big-city school chiefs aware of the narrow margin of

leadership potential available to them as executives of massive organizations may be able to parlay the multiple, conflicting roles into a leadership constellation that delivers both symbolic and real gains. For them to do so, would be, in a word often favored by schoolmen, a challenge.

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